

# Could women voters decide the 2026 election?



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Views expressed in this article are the author's own.

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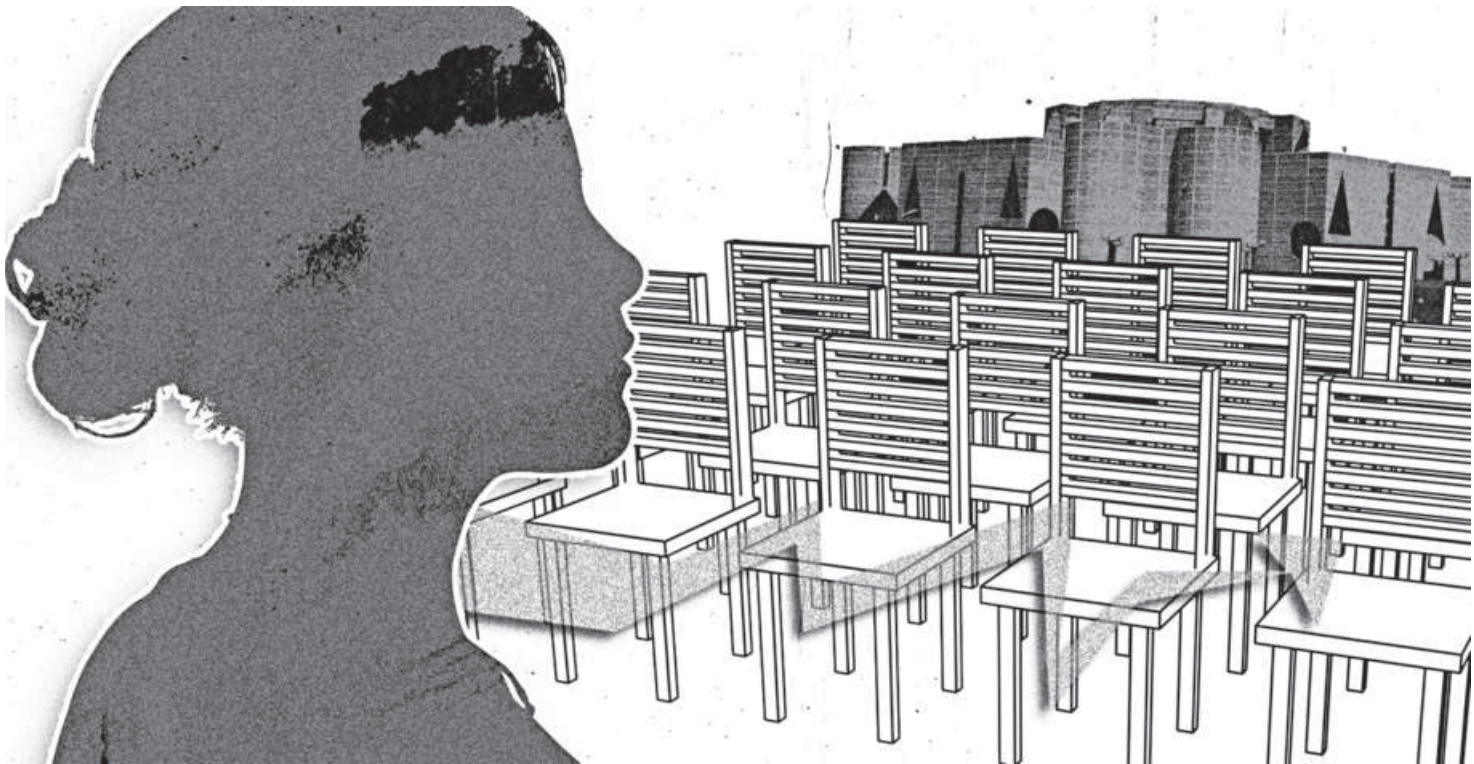
During my recent travel to Cox’s Bazar, I asked two women farmers at a training centre, “Will you vote?” Both smiled and said yes, but neither disclosed who they would vote for. The results of the latest poll survey by Innovision Consulting, especially data focusing on women, prompted me to ask this question. According to the March 2025 survey report by Innovision, about 62 percent of 10,696 respondents said they had already made up their minds about voting. Among women, however, the figure was lower at only 57 percent. More than a third had not decided, and another nine percent preferred not to say.

Nearly six months later, a September 2025 follow-up survey found that overall decisiveness had declined slightly to 57.8 percent, but for women it fell further, to 51.6 percent. Undecided women rose to nearly 38 percent, with refusals nudging up to 10.6 percent. In short, the pool of undecided and silent women has expanded over six months.

When compared with men, the contrast is even sharper. In September, men were significantly more decisive than women. Asked why they were undecided, 23.1 percent of women said they were not even thinking about the election. These numbers present more than just statistics: women disproportionately constitute the swing vote. Yet, political parties do not yet appear to have adjusted their messages and strategies to reflect this reality.

Why the number matters

Historically, Bangladeshi women have balanced multiple roles: supporting families, managing households, working outside the home, and caring for children. Their daily realities revolve around access to essentials, safety and security, children’s education, care work, and economic independence.



The latest students’ union polls mirror national trends, in which women are less likely to decide early and weigh practical, everyday concerns more heavily than ideological ones.

FILE VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

These are not just “generic” concerns. Another Innovision survey report revealed that issues such as inflation, jobs, education, and healthcare—ranked as top national concerns—disproportionately affect women. Housewives, in particular, are on the frontlines of managing rising household costs, arranging children’s education, and ensuring family health.

This is why we need to view women’s votes

distinctly from men’s. Their concerns and lived realities diverge, and their hesitation in deciding whom to vote for is partly rooted in their distance from political discourse. A large number of female respondents identified as housewives, and overall, women were less engaged in political conversations. Their indecision does not signal apathy; rather, it reflects a lack of recognition of their priorities.

care responsibilities, work, and financial autonomy. Election administrators also have a role here: ensuring safe polling sites, childcare, transport, and gender-sensitive staff to encourage female participation.

Shifts in party support

Looking at the revealed preferences, March’s survey showed BNP at 41.7 percent, Jamaat at 31.6 percent, and Awami League (AL) around 14 percent. By September, AL had risen to

(DUCSU) and Jahangirnagar University Central Students’ Union (JACSU). The results of these much-discussed elections, where Jamaat’s student wing gained considerable ground, indicate that women students vote more cautiously and take longer to decide than their male peers. While turnout among female students has been strong, their choices often prioritise integrity, inclusivity, and issue-based leadership over strict party allegiance. This potentially portends national trends in which women are less likely to decide early and to weigh practical, everyday concerns more heavily than ideological ones. Whether on campuses or at the national level, women’s votes are decisive and demand that parties engage with their priorities thoughtfully rather than assuming uniformity with men.

The comparison of the March and September polls makes one thing clear: women are not merely undecided; they are uniquely positioned to decide.

Women’s swing vote potential is greater than men’s. They are cautious, observant, and deliberate in their choices. Parties that genuinely listen to, respect, and engage women—addressing daily essentials, law and order, children’s needs, and economic opportunities—will not only benefit from a positive outcome in the election but also shape the future of Bangladesh’s democracy.

Across South Asia, women voters have steadily grown into decisive electoral actors. In India, the gender gap in turnout has not only closed but, in many states, women now outvote men, shaping outcomes through welfare schemes tied to daily life such as cooking gas, rations, and housing. Nepal and Sri Lanka show relatively high turnout but limited representation, with women’s influence concentrated at the ballot rather than in leadership.

If women voted exactly like men, their late decisions might matter less. But the data shows they do not. Women are more hesitant, less politically engaged, and carry different burdens in everyday life. Their distinct concerns will guide their choices. This makes them not only the majority of the undecided but the single most important group for any party hoping to win in the upcoming national election.

## WORLD TEACHERS’ DAY

# The unsung architects of Bangladesh’s progress



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Bangladesh’s teaching tradition is steeped in diversity, shaped by educators who carried both chalk and conscience. National Professor Abdur Razzaq, remembered as the “teacher of teachers,” inspired generations to embrace critical thinking and civic responsibility. Another National Professor, Dewan Mohammad Azraf, fused ethics and literature to show students that education is inseparable from values and identity. Begum Rokeya, the trailblazing social reformer and educationist, championed women’s right to education in an era when such ideas were revolutionary. Hafezzi Hujur, the respected Islamic scholar, strengthened spiritual and moral teaching through his madrasa work, reflecting the deep roots of religious education in the country. Together, they capture the breadth of Bangladesh’s teaching heritage—from reform to faith—reminding us that in this land, teachers have always been nation-builders.

The nobility of teaching in Bangladesh has also been etched in sacrifice. Earlier this year,

the nation mourned Maherin Chowdhury, a courageous teacher at Milestone School and College in Dhaka, who lost her life after rescuing dozens of students when a military jet crashed into the school building. Her bravery evokes the memory of Dr Mohammad Shamsuzzoha, a professor at Rajshahi University who stood before the then Pakistani army to shield protesting students, declaring, “Before a bullet strikes a student, it must pierce me first.” These acts remind us that in Bangladesh, teachers have not only shaped young minds but have also stood on the frontlines of danger, protecting the very lives entrusted to their care. Their courage reinforces the truth that the calling of a teacher here is as much about guardianship as it is about knowledge.

The Covid-19 crisis reshaped education globally, but in Bangladesh, its effects were particularly acute. Schools remained shut for extended periods, forcing teachers to become pillars of continuity for learners isolated at home. With little preparation, many adapted

quickly, recording lessons on smartphones and sharing materials over messaging apps. To reach students without internet access, teachers often visited neighbourhoods on foot or cycled across villages, leaving printed worksheets at doorsteps. Many bore the financial and emotional burden themselves, covering printouts, data costs, or travel expenses out of pocket. Their creativity and persistence kept education alive across urban and rural Bangladesh, proving that when systems falter, it is the conviction of teachers that sustains learning.

However, Unesco warns that the world will need millions more teachers by 2030 to meet even basic education goals, as classrooms everywhere are strained by attrition, burnout, and declining professional appeal. Bangladesh mirrors this global challenge: thousands of sanctioned posts in government schools remain vacant, vocational and technical institutes run with skeletal staff, and universities struggle with student backlogs due to faculty shortages. In rural areas, where children are most vulnerable to dropping out, one absent teacher can mean the collapse of an entire classroom. These shortages demonstrate that education’s future cannot rely on heroic improvisation but on a renewed commitment to teachers.

At the same time, the rapid growth of ed-tech platforms and AI tools in Bangladesh—from platforms like 10 Minute School to AI-powered modules on Shikho—has opened new avenues for reaching learners. These innovations have proven valuable, particularly

in moments of crisis or in places where teachers are scarce. Nevertheless, they also highlight a vital truth: technology may deliver lessons, but it cannot spark curiosity, build confidence, or guide students through moral and civic dilemmas. A tablet can replace a textbook, but never a teacher’s pedagogy, empathy, or example. In the end, ed-tech is more efficient when it supports teachers, extending their reach, while the essence of true learning remains profoundly human.

Bangladesh’s teachers have also carried learning to the nation’s margins, where formal schooling often falters. The community schools pioneered by Brac stand as a model of what teacher-led innovation can achieve: in one-room classrooms across villages, local women trained as para-teachers have given millions of children a first doorway into education, often the first in their families to hold a book. This same spirit of service is evident in the refugee camps of Cox’s Bazar, where Bangladeshi teachers keep hope alive for children uprooted by conflict. Further, in flood-prone regions, floating classrooms have brought teachers and books aboard boats, ensuring that rising waters do not wash away a child’s chance to learn. Thus, teachers turn uncertainty into possibility, reminding us that education endures wherever a teacher chooses to stand.

However, in recent years, MPO-listed teachers have staged repeated protests, demanding nationalisation of their institutions and fair allowances on par with government employees. In madrasas and

non-government schools, many struggle with delayed or unpaid salaries. Teachers further contend with limited professional development opportunities, inadequate housing, research funding and medical allowances, and a growing sense that their work is undervalued compared with other professions. If dignity, pay, and professional support are neglected, the teaching profession itself may wither, even as Bangladesh relies on teachers to drive the promise of “Bangladesh 2.0.”

Teachers in Bangladesh carry a responsibility that stretches far beyond the classroom. They prepare young people to thrive not only within the country but also as part of a global community. Some go abroad to represent Bangladesh in industries, research, and leadership, while others remain to nurture local enterprises, technologies, and social change. In both paths, the responsibility often falls on teachers to build the confidence and skills that allow students to contribute meaningfully.

Bangladesh’s story of education has always been written in the dedication of its teachers. They have sacrificed, innovated, and persevered not only to keep learning alive in times of crisis but also to nurture a generation ready for both local challenges and global opportunities. If Bangladesh is to step forward with confidence on the world stage, it must first honour and uplift those who have always been its truest nation-builders—its teachers.

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

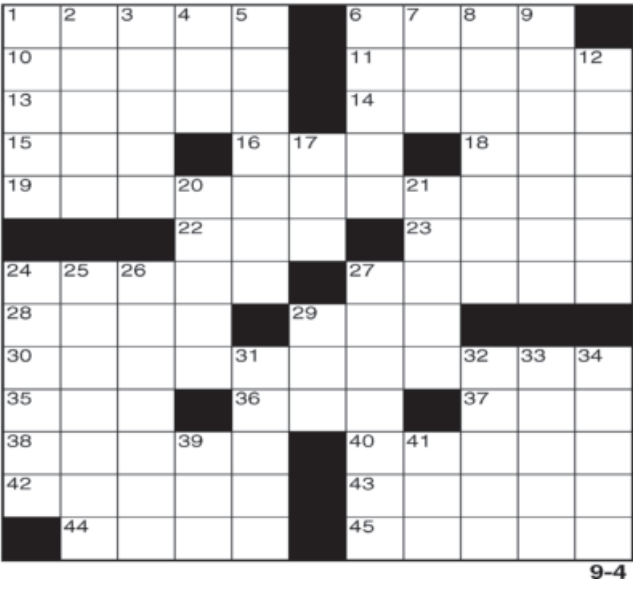
ACROSS

- 1 Stay away from
- 6 Homer and Marge’s boy
- 10 Murdered
- 11 Really impressed
- 13 Not flimsy
- 14 Strips for breakfast
- 15 Quarterback Manning
- 16 Motor need
- 18 Retina setting
- 19 John L. Lewis or Cesar Chavez
- 22 Employ
- 23 Antlered animal
- 24 Let up
- 27 Tale
- 28 Do origami

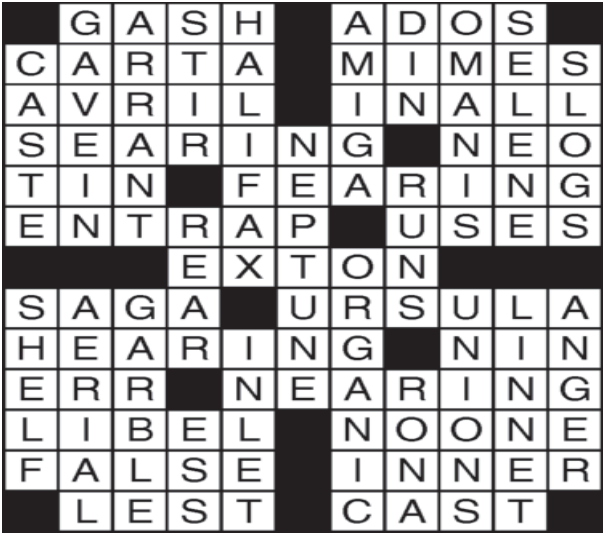
DOWN

- 1 Car of the ‘50s
- 2 One of the strings
- 3 Make up lines
- 4 502, in old Rome
- 5 Sign, as a check
- 6 Pastor’s book
- 29 Water cooler
- 30 Supply of available workers
- 35 Had lunch
- 36 Corn unit
- 37 Brewery product
- 38 Bugged down
- 40 Oral traditions
- 42 Contest form
- 43 Build
- 44 Clinton’s veep
- 45 Camp structures

- 7 Santa —, California
- 8 Approached speedily
- 9 Like a congressman’s term
- 12 Vigor
- 17 — de France
- 20 Surpass
- 21 Fall flower
- 24 Blazing
- 25 Lake activity
- 26 Skier Tomba
- 27 Red hue
- 29 “— little teapot ...”
- 31 Color anew
- 32 Singer Carpenter
- 33 Put in office
- 34 Exams
- 39 Make missteps
- 41 Mine rock



## YESTERDAY’S ANSWERS



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